



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1515/jelf-2013-0016](https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2013-0016)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Leung, C. (2013). The "social" in English Language Teaching: abstracted norms versus situated enactments. *Journal of English as a lingua franca*, 2(2), 283 – 313. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jelf-2013-0016>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Constant Leung

# The “social” in English Language Teaching: abstracted norms versus situated enactments

**Abstract:** The worldwide enterprise of English Language Teaching (ELT) has consciously attended to social rules and conventions in its modelling of language use. In this article I will first examine the theoretical basis of the “social” as it has been understood in influential curriculum discussions and internationally marketed textbooks. It will be shown that there is a tendency to portray social conventions of language use in terms of abstracted and decontextualised native speaker norms. Drawing on data collected in ethnolinguistically diverse school and university classrooms in London, I will illustrate that socially agreeable ways of language use are fluidly and sensitively negotiated *in situ* by participants. Some of the observations and arguments in this article will resonate with the analytic sensibilities shown in recent research in the fields of English as a Lingua Franca and sociolinguistics. The discussion will conclude with a call for a more empirically oriented approach to conceptualizing the “social” in ELT that takes account of situated language and social practices.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching; English as a Lingua Franca; English as an Additional Language; English as a Second Language; communicative competence; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; classroom interaction; sociolinguistics

## 英語教學中有關“社會”層面的觀點：抽象的準則與情境中語言使用之相對

**摘要** 遍及全球性的英語教學(ELT)已致力於了解語言使用模式中相關的社會規則和慣例。在這篇文章中，我將先檢視“社會”的理論依據由於它已在有影響性的課程討論和國際性銷售的教科書中被理解與討論。這將顯示描述語言使用的社會慣例較傾向於就抽象且脫離母語準則的語境而論。此研究使用在英國倫敦多元種族語言的學校和大學課堂中取得的資料來舉例說明社會認可的語言使用方式是由本研究受訪者在通過互動過程中有彈性及敏感性地共同達成。此文章中的一些觀察和論點與近期在英語為世界共通語和社會語言學之領域研究中的分析角度有所共鳴。本研究結果呼籲未來的研究應採用直接觀察性取向的方法來探討在英語教學中有關“社會”層面的觀點，在此中考慮到情境中的語言使用和社會實踐。

**關鍵字** 英語教學、英語為世界共通語、英語為附加的語言、英語為第二語言、溝通能力、歐洲共同語言參考架構、課堂互動、社會語言學

---

**Constant Leung:** Centre for Language Discourse and Communication, Department of Education and Professional Studies at King's College London. E-mail: constant.leung@kcl.ac.uk

## 1 Introduction

The world-wide enterprise of English Language Teaching (ELT) has been working with a widely recognised curriculum orientation, which has in turn spawned a well-developed pedagogic infrastructure. For some forty years now the concept of communicative competence has been a key influence on curriculum design; the concept itself has been consistently acknowledged by ELT professionals (curriculum designers, policy makers, researchers, and teachers) to be a key reference point. The longevity of this paradigm has provided a stable environment for the development of curriculum and assessment frameworks and teaching materials. The status and role of English, however, has altered radically over recent years and this calls for a reconsideration of this concept and its pedagogic relevance.

Researchers in the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) have, as readers of this journal will know, argued for the need for a re-appraisal of the concept of communicative competence (see, for example, Seidlhofer 2011). In a similar vein it will be argued in this article that the need for re-appraisal extends to the use of English in English-dominant environments where there is a high level of ethno-linguistic diversity among the speakers. My focus of attention will be on issues related to sociocultural values and norms embedded in ELT curriculum statements and materials. Many of the points raised in this discussion naturally resonate with ideas and arguments in ELF research. Despite the contextual differences between ELF communication and the use of English in ethnolinguistically diverse English-dominant situations, there are shared analytic and interpretive sensibilities between the two fields, particularly in relation to normativities in language use. Relevant arguments and insights from ELF research will be mentioned where appropriate.

In this paper, I will first revisit briefly the conceptual foundations of communicative competence to create a backdrop for a discussion on the ways in which the concept itself has been interpreted and operationalized in curriculum statements and teaching materials. At that point I will introduce some

spoken language interaction data collected in ethnolinguistically diverse classrooms to illustrate the need to complexify and extend the notion of communicative competence. The paper will end with a discussion on alternative perspectives and their implications for ELT in terms of further developments. The methodological approach adopted here is analytic induction – an effort to “show how general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances” (Mitchell 1984: 239). Rhetorically, this is an attempt to use a “telling case,” or more accurately telling episodes of classroom interaction, to illustrate a conceptual argument.

## 2 Communicative competence

The concept of communicative competence has been inextricably associated with ELT for the best part of forty years. The advent of this concept in language teaching in the 1970s has been widely heralded as a key moment marking the waning of the authority of the traditional grammar-focused approaches, and the dawning of a more culturally and socially tuned approach to curriculum design and classroom pedagogy. Drawing particularly on the work of Brumfit and Johnson (1979), Hymes (e.g., 1972, 1974), Halliday (e.g., Halliday et al. 1964; Halliday 1973, 1975), the notion of language itself was recast in terms of a set of semiotic resources used by speakers to make meaning in context. This shift in the orientation to language was accompanied by a host of complementary ideas that promoted learners’ active use of the target language in the classroom. On this “more-than-grammar” view of English language the focus of curriculum and pedagogy would shift from emphasizing language as a free-standing system of rules (mainly expressed through grammar) and semantic values (largely represented by vocabulary) to embracing the ways in which grammar and vocabulary are used in actual communication. Teaching English means teaching the ways in which English is used by “real” people. This socio-cultural turn was well-received by ELT professionals and researchers. Since then the concept of communicative competence has become something of a professional kitemark in ELT worldwide. It has come to be regarded as the foundation of curriculum design, classroom pedagogy, and assessment frameworks; the popular teaching approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is directly associated with this development. In the round then, under the influence of this re-configured notion of language, there has been a strong push for ELT to focus on the development of “functional language ability through

learner participation in communicative events” (Savignon 2005: 637). (For a further discussion see Howatt with Widdowson 2004: Ch. 20; Leung 2005, 2010.)

Despite this widespread professional support, the usefulness and validity claims associated with communicative competence and CLT have been questioned (Canagarajah 1999, 2006; Holliday 1994, 2005), and the simplistic interpretation of the concept in pedagogic practice has been critically discussed (Widdowson 2003). There is also a persistent lack of clarity in the relationship between certified communicative competence, e.g., in the form of test scores, and observed capacity to communicate in English effectively in context, particularly in academic contexts (Ingram and Bayliss 2007; Lee and Greene 2007; Paul 2007). Furthermore, over the period of the last four decades several globalised developments have complexified the use of English in the world. For instance, sustained migration into English-speaking countries means that the use of English as an Additional/Second Language (from now on EAL) by speakers from other-language backgrounds is now routine in all spheres of private and public life. At the same time, as has been extensively discussed in the ELF literature, there has been continuing spread of the use of English as a lingua franca in different parts of the world. Taken together, these developments mean that we cannot assume that the use of the language for real world purposes is automatically infused with sociocultural and language norms and practices found in countries traditionally described as English-speaking. All of this suggests that the concept of communicative competence in ELT, which embodies many mid-twentieth century intellectual values and assumptions, may now need to be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances, particularly in terms of how it has been interpreted in curriculum and pedagogic materials.

However, ELT is a broadly constituted and expanding professional field that encompasses the teaching of English as a foreign language and as an additional/second language (although these labels are increasingly difficult to operate, see Dewey 2012a). English language programmes can be found in virtually all parts of the world, in a variety of institutional settings (e.g., publicly funded universities and schools and commercially operated language schools), and for many different purposes (e.g., English for Specific Purposes for workers in particular occupations and English language for immigrants). It would be beyond the scope of this article to cover all instances of curriculum and practice. For reasons of scope, I will look at the ways in which communicative competence has been interpreted in ELT by looking at two significant sites within its professional infrastructure: the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and textbooks.

## 2.1 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)

The CEFR is an important and relevant reference point for this discussion. Firstly, it is a curriculum and assessment framework for additional/second language education with explicit theoretical and conceptual links to the concept of communicative competence (Council of Europe 2001: Ch. 2; Alderson 2007). Officially it is described as “[. . .] a comprehensive descriptive scheme offering a tool for reflecting on what is involved not only in language use, but also in language learning and teaching. The Framework provides a common basis and a common language for the elaboration of syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, textbooks, teacher training programmes, and for relating language examinations to one another” (Martyniuk 2005: 11). Secondly, although it was produced by the Council of Europe as a piece of advice designed to promote additional/second language education and to provide a common curriculum basis for the teaching of languages, its rapid adoption by European governments is said to have “[. . .] greatly contributed to the creation of a new European language domain where all countries have agreed [. . .] to promote one another’s languages” (Bonnet 2007: 670). The CEFR is no longer just a “piece of advice”; it now underpins most of the national language curricula across Europe and it is a key benchmarking reference point for EU-wide language assessment frameworks, e.g., the European Survey of Language Competences (2008–, [www.surveylang.org](http://www.surveylang.org)). As Alderson (2007: 600) observes, “[. . .] nobody engaged in language education in Europe can ignore the existence of the CEFR.”

And perhaps because of its widely accepted supra-national status, it has now been incorporated in many educational systems and assessment schemes in other parts of the world. For instance, the curriculum and assessment framework for modern languages in New Zealand schools are referenced to the CEFR proficiency levels (Scarino 2005). Other examples include the adoption of the CEFR for assessment of English as an additional/second language in a Mexican university (Despaigne and Grossi 2011) and for a test of Chinese as a Second Language developed in Taiwan (Lan 2007). Many of the key players of the international ELT enterprise have also adopted the CEFR as a key reference point. For instance, three of the world’s most well-known English language tests, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Pearson Test of English (Academic), and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), are aligned to the CEFR proficiency framework. Likewise, many of the popular ELT textbooks claim explicit linkage to the CEFR. Their alignment with the CEFR, and with the concept of communicative competence, is particularly salient for this discussion because of the impact high-stakes tests can have on teaching content (e.g., Cheng et al. 2004)

and because the results of these tests are routinely used for student selection by English-speaking universities (for further discussion, see McNamara 2011).

Within the CEFR framework, communicative competence is made up of three component competences:

*Linguistic competences* include lexical, phonological, syntactic knowledge and skills [...] independently of the sociolinguistic value of its variations and the pragmatic functions of its realisations [...]

*Sociolinguistic competences* refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use [which include] rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups [...]

*Pragmatic competences* are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges [...] (Council of Europe 2001: 12)

These component competences are expressed and calibrated in six proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), each level comprising a set of competence descriptors covering spoken and written language use in a range of context/domain/purpose-specific scales, e.g., addressing audiences (Council of Europe 2001: 60), writing reports and essays (2001: 62), conversation (2001: 76), formal discussion and meetings (2001: 78), interviews (2001: 82), and service encounters (2001: 80).

A1 is the lowest level and C2 the highest. The following descriptors are taken from the “Global” scale to illustrate the proficiency progression built into the levels. For ease of referencing in the ensuing discussion, the descriptors are assigned a lower case letter:

#### A1

- (a) Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.
- (b) Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has.
- (c) Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

#### C2

- (a) Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.
- (b) Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.

- (c) Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.  
(Council of Europe 2001: 24)

Collectively the A1 descriptors are mainly concerned with everyday communication at a low level of linguistic competence. There is no explicit reference to sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. The reason for this narrow focus on the use of (limited) speaker-learner linguistic resources seems to indicate a tacit assumption that linguistic competence is the most important component for communication, particularly at the lower levels of proficiency.

In contrast, the C2 level descriptors cover all three component competences – linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic. Descriptor C2 (a) is a statement on the speaker-learners’ overall capacity to use language knowledge for understanding contingent spoken and written communication. Descriptor C2 (b) suggests a capacity to work with spoken and written language across genres and styles in a rhetorically and discursively coherent manner. Descriptor C2 (c) spells out the speaker’s capacity to use language proficiently to make appropriate/subtle meaning in socioculturally sensitive ways. However, as Alderson (2007) observes, there is little detailed information in these “can do” descriptors. For instance, in relation to C2 (c) one has to “fill in,” as it were, the linguistic and pragmatic details for phrases such as “express [...] fluently and precisely” and “differentiating [...] meaning in [...] complex situations.”

Across the different domain/context-specific scales within the CEFR, the lower level proficiency descriptors tend to see language communication more in terms of grammatical competence at the vocabulary and sentence levels than sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. As speakers/learners move towards more advanced levels they are expected to show a capacity to use language effectively in line with (CEFR-) recognised sociocultural conventions in context. For instance, at A1 level of the Transactions To Obtain Goods And Services scale (Council of Europe 2001: 80) the descriptors are: “Can ask people for things and give people things” and “Can handle numbers, quantities, cost and time”; whereas at the highest level, descriptors such as “Can outline a case for compensation, using persuasive language to demand satisfaction and state clearly the limits to any concession he/she is prepared to make, invoke the capacity to use socio-pragmatic knowledge explicitly.”

Ontologically the formulation of the CEFR descriptors suggests that communicative competence is conceived as a capacity to use relevant language knowledge residing in the individual and, at advanced levels of proficiency, a capacity to use this knowledge in socioculturally conventionalised ways. Statements in the A1 and C2 Global scale descriptors (cited above) such as



“can understand [. . .]” and “[c]an summarise information from different spoken and written sources” clearly instantiate this “individual capacity” perspective. The social conventions of language use are built into the specifications of the individual speaker’s repertoire. This aspect of the framework can be seen in the invocation of sociolinguistic competence in the Sociolinguistic Appropriateness scale (Council of Europe 2001) which, *inter alia*, contain the following descriptors:

- A1 Can establish basic social contact by using the simplest everyday forms of: greetings and farewells; introductions [. . .]
  - B2 Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.
  - C2 Appreciates fully the sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications of language used by native speakers and can react accordingly.
- (Council of Europe 2001: 122)

In the above descriptors, and many others, the social dimension is clearly visible. But the social, in terms of language and communication, is understood as established conventions that exist independently of the individual speaker/learner. The social is stable and predictable; it is inscribed as an aspect of an individual’s repertoire. The sociocultural conventions of language use embedded in the proficiency descriptors are explicitly normed on the putative native speaker, a value-based construct presented as a common-sense reference (see further discussion in the final section). It follows that speakers/learners are meant to enact the language and communication repertoires they have acquired in learning (and other) activities in which a set of established sociocultural and pragmatic conventions provides powerful scripts for language use in social interaction, and from which individuals do not, or at least should not be encouraged to, depart. This perspective has afforded an assumed certainty in the framing of the CEFR. This has also allowed the CEFR descriptors to take the form of “can-do” statements on transactional efficacy over a range of context/purpose-specific scales, e.g., the “Information Exchange” scale (Council of Europe 2001: 81). Given the assumed stability in communicative uses of language, a key question here is: Do these descriptors adequately cover the range of meaning-making topoi in which teachers and students interact with one another in curriculum and other activities? I will return to this question presently. More immediately, I will look at a sample of ELT textbooks to see how the concept of communicative competence, perhaps better still for the purpose of this part of the discussion, *communicativeness*, has been operationalised in teaching materials.

## 2.2 ELT textbooks

The textbook is often regarded as the bedrock of ELT teaching provision, especially in educational environments where English is not a medium of wider social communication, e.g., some countries in the Pacific-rim such as China and South Korea. Many of the internationally marketed textbooks explicitly affiliate themselves to the CEFR and to a notion of “communicative English.” This affiliation can be seen in terms of language and carrier content, learning activities, and/or approaches to language norms, a snapshot of which is offered here. My observations will refer to three sets of textbook material as examples; they are included in this discussion for three reasons: they are currently available internationally (at least one of them is reported to be a major seller); they are produced by publishers located in the United Kingdom and the United States (both major centres of ELT materials production); and, of particular relevance to this discussion, they claim to be aligned to the CEFR proficiency framework.

In terms of content, perhaps unsurprisingly, the mainstay of these textbooks is vocabulary and grammar for spoken and written language. I will focus on the ways in which the different aspects of language-focussed content material have been brought together in these books to promote the development of English language proficiency that is meant to be socially tuned.

The first observations are drawn from the elementary and intermediate level books of the *New Headway* series written by Soars and Soars (2009, 2011). The elementary level is aligned to CEFR A1 and A2 levels, and the intermediate level covers B1 and B2. The content material is organised as units. Each unit has a theme and it is accompanied by a strapline displaying the language content and teaching-learning activities. For instance, in the *Elementary Student Book* the first unit is on the theme of “You and me” with a strapline that shows:

am/is/are • my/your/his/her • Verbs – have/go ... • Possessive’s ... • Everyday conversation (Soars and Soars 2011: 6)

This “grammar and real-life language” motif seems to be the organising principle for all the themes in the Headway series. The teaching content is focussed on grammar, vocabulary, everyday English usages (associated with different themes), and the learning activities involve reading, listening, speaking, and writing exercises.

In the elementary level book the teaching content and learning activities are designed to introduce and practise vocabulary and grammar at the phrase/

sentence level. Although the student is invited to do the learning activities by themselves, a good deal of the content is oriented to social communication. For example, one of the first listening and reading activities in Unit 1 is a conversation:

A Hello. What's your first name?

B My name's Bill

A And what's your surname?

B Frasier . . .

(Soars and Soars 2011: 6)

At the intermediate level many of the exercises are “interactive” and “communicative” in that they are designed as collaborative activities involving exchange of information. For example, the “My favourite day of the week” exercise in the “The working week” unit invites students to look at four photographs each depicting a person in their occupations and to work in pairs asking and answering questions:

What does Vicky do? She's a schoolgirl.

What's she doing? She's doing her homework.

(Soars and Soars 2009: 14)

This collaborative approach is also built into reading activities. For instance, in the unit on the theme of “A world of difference” (Soars and Soars 2009: 10–11) the two reading texts are about two families, one in Kenya and one in China. Students are first invited to discuss questions about their own family as a warm-up activity, e.g., “Who is in your immediate family?” and “Who do you live with now?”. They are then divided into two groups, one group is asked to read the text on the Kenyan family, the other group on the Chinese family. The students are then asked to work on a set of comprehension questions to answer (e.g., “Where do they live?” and “How long have they lived there?”) with the other members of their reading group. After that the students are regrouped as pairs, each pair comprising one student from the “Kenya” group and one from the “China” group. They are to compare the information they have gleaned from their reading passage and work together on questions such as “What similarities and differences can you find?”.

In the intermediate level material the student is also provided with some sociolinguistic information. For example, the “Spoken English” section in Unit 1 “A world of difference” has a subtitle: “Sounding polite”, the student is advised that:

- 1 In English conversation it can sound impolite to reply with just *yes* or *no*. We use short answers with auxiliaries.  
*‘Did you have a good day?’ ‘Yes, I did/No, I didn’t.’*
  - 2 It also helps if you add some more information.  
*‘Do you have much homework? Yes, I do. Loads. I’ve got Geography. French, and Maths.’*
- (Soars and Soars 2009: 8).

And in Unit 2 “The working week” the “Spoken English” section advises that:

In conversation, we sometimes don’t want to sound too negative. We often soften comments.

We were late landing. *We were **a bit** late landing.*

My room is tiny. *My room **isn’t very big**, but it’s OK.*

(Soars and Soars 2009: 21; original italics and emphasis)

The advice provided here is presented as objective facts: “In English conversation . . .” gives the impression that there is a universal invariant rule that all speakers of English would adhere to. Similarly, the inclusive use of the pronoun “we” in the statement “In conversation, we sometimes don’t want to sound . . .” suggests that this piece of advice reflects a settled language practice shared by all English speakers at all times. This is, of course, a partial representation of a much more complex and dynamic phenomenon. (I will return to this point in the next section.)

The next set of observations is drawn from the *Top Notch* series written by Saslow and Ascher (2006). This American-produced series is a six-level course for adults that “prepares students to interact successfully with both native and non-native speakers of English” and helps students to achieve a “Top Notch communicative competence” (2006: ix). The content is divided into units with separate sections on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, social language, speaking activities, listening, reading, and writing. It is also stated that the series has been designed to help “[. . .] students develop a cultural fluency by creating an awareness of the varied rules across cultures for: politeness, greetings and introductions, appropriateness of dress in different settings, conversation do’s and taboos, table manners, and other similar issues” (2006: ix). Some of the content material shows sensitivity to cross-cultural differences, e.g., in a listening and intonation practice activity in Unit 1 (2006: 4) students are provided with models of asking for permission from a new acquaintance to address them by their first name such as “Do you mind if I call you Kazuko?”. This activity, like many others in this series, is designed to encourage students to work together to make use of their

developing language knowledge in conversation and in reading and writing tasks. In addition to the culturally informed language-learning activities, students are given explicit instructions in intercultural awareness. For instance, in a unit entitled “Cultural Literacy” (Saslow and Ascher 2006) the section “Be culturally literate” contains “Vocabulary” for listening and practice:

etiquette                      the “rules” of polite behaviour

When travelling, it’s important to be aware of the etiquette of the culture you will be visiting.

cultural literacy    knowing about and respecting the culture of others and following their rules of etiquette when interacting with them.

In today’s world, cultural literacy is essential to success and good relations with others.

(Saslow and Ascher 2006: 8)

The third set of observations is drawn from the series *New English Files*, produced by Oxenden and Latham-Koenig (2006). This is a six-level general English course for adults. The levels are aligned with the CEFR framework. Some broad similarities with the two series mentioned above can be found: the content is organised in thematic units; there is an explicit focus on (thematically related) vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in the listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks; the teaching and learning activities encourage student collaboration; and the carrier content in the teaching material has a strong multicultural feel. Examples of these features can be seen in Unit 1 of the intermediate level course book (aligned to CEFR B1 and B2 levels). The unit is on the theme of “Food: fuel or pleasure?”. The language teaching points are clearly flagged at the beginning of the unit:

G[rammar]                      present simple and continuous; action and non-action verbs

V[ocabulary]                food and restaurants

P[ronunciation]    /ʊ/ and /u:/, understanding phonetics

(Oxenden and Latham-Koenig 2006: 4)

The teaching content is divided into sections labelled “Reading & Speaking” and “Grammar” and so on. Pair or collaborative work is built into the learning activities. For instance, in this unit students are asked to read the answers given by two women in interviews about food. The interview questions are included in the reading material. The two women interviewees are from San Francisco and Lyons. This is followed by two comprehension exercises designed to help students to work on the content meaning and associated vocabulary. At this point students

are invited to interview each other using the interview questions that they have read.

Taken together these observations suggest that the notion of communicativeness has been operationalised in three ways. Firstly, by encouraging students to work with each other, classroom interaction and active language use in collaborative learning activities are themselves instances of communication. Within a classroom context these activities can be seen as real communication (and at the same time a kind of rehearsal for future communication). Secondly, some of the carrier content in the written, audio, and graphic texts can be seen as an attempt at incorporating awareness-raising information on intercultural communication. For instance, the interview transcripts of the two women from San Francisco and Lyons, and the reading passages on family life in Kenya and China, represent deliberate inclusion of culturally diverse material. Given that English is widely used as an additional language and a lingua franca, and intercultural sensitivity is generally regarded as prerequisite for effective communication with people from different backgrounds, this interculturalism in the carrier content has been, presumably, designed to help develop students’ communicative capacity. (There may also be a commercial incentive to produce materials with contents that would appeal to the international market.) Thirdly, the pragmatically oriented advice on socially preferred ways of using language, e.g., the mitigating use of “a bit”, reflects the pedagogic goal of inducting students into conventionally established sociocultural meanings and norms of a target language community. This betrays a widely held assumption that if students can try to “do as the natives do,” their capacity to communicate would be enhanced. An important pedagogically oriented question here: Is it enough for learners of English to try to reproduce what “natives do”?

## 2.3 A settled view of communicative competence – a partial representation

The above observations on the CEFR and the textbook examples, seen as a whole, suggest that communicativeness has been understood primarily as the capacity to use a body of linguistic and intercultural knowledge in accordance with the sociocultural and pragmatic conventions and norms associated with a set of typified purposes and social scenarios in a reference language community. Achieving competence means appropriating and using the grammatical and sociocultural norms of the putative native speaker of the reference language community. Seen in this light, communicative competence is understood as a stable phenomenon and a repertoire that can be specified in advance. However, as Widdowson (2012)

points out, there are myriads of ways in which the English language as a set of linguistic resources can be used by native speakers to create meaning, but what counts as acceptable represents the conventionally established usages and patterns at a given time, and the grounds for conferring the “conventionally established” status may be ideological and sociocultural, not linguistic. It is clearly useful for learners of English to know what native speakers do with the language. But in a world where the use of English may not even involve native speakers (in ELF communication) and where the established native speaker conventions of use may not hold sway (particularly in contexts of intense ethnolinguistic diversity where meaning, let alone language norms, is contingently negotiated), learning to do “what natives speakers do” can only be a part of a bigger pedagogic concern.

I will now return to the question raised earlier in relation to the CEFR: Do the descriptors under discussion adequately cover the range of meaning-making topoi in which teachers and students interact with one another in curriculum and other activities?

### 3 Views from the classroom

In this section I will present two data extracts to illustrate aspects of classroom communication that would raise issues of adequacy for the CEFR proficiency descriptors and scales. These extracts represent examples of situated meaning making that are not within the purview of the CEFR. Routine performativities such as giving a prepared short talk as part of a class assignment, while important as part of overall communicative competence, are already covered by the CEFR descriptors. Therefore they are not under direct scrutiny here. The data extracts are drawn from a corpus of video recordings collected in a two-year research project investigating language and literacy practices in ethnolinguistically diverse school and university settings.<sup>1</sup> The participant schools and universities were located in London, where more than 300 languages are spoken in schools (Von Ahn et al. 2010). The linguistic landscape is very complex. English is the medium of instruction and the language of institutional communication, but in many classrooms and for many participants, English is an additional language and the use of English can be seen as a particular case of lingua franca in an English-dominant environment. All the activities recorded were non-contrived. Perhaps it should be pointed out here that the purpose of looking at classroom communication is not

---

<sup>1</sup> The extracts are drawn from a larger corpus of data collected for a two-year ESRC-funded language and literacy research project RES-062-23-1666 (2009/11).

to call for inclusion of such material in ELT textbooks; the intention is to show the complex and contingent nature of the enactment of pragmatic meaning.

The data extracts were prepared and analysed in a two-stage process. Following Bloome et al. (2009), each of the video recordings of the teaching sessions was first segmented into classroom activity phases (e.g., “organising students for lesson” and “discussing student work”). The identification of the different phases was carried out inductively after repeated viewing while asking the question “what’s happening?”. In the second stage the selective segments deemed relevant for this discussion were transcribed for further analysis focussing on participant discourse roles (Scollon 1996, building on Goffman 1981), with a view to establishing that the teachers and students involved were interacting/speaking on their own volition. Scollon (1996: 4) suggests that there are two parallel discourse roles:

<u>Productive</u>		<u>Receptive</u>
animator	<i>mechanical</i>	receptor
author	<i>rhetorical</i>	interpreter
principal	<i>responsible</i>	judge

Very briefly, these roles can be explained through an everyday example. When talking to a friend or a family member (animator role) we choose our own words to convey our meaning (author role), and we take responsibility for the things that we say (principal role). Likewise when listening to a friend (receptor role), we try to make sense of what we hear (interpreter role), and we decide how to respond (judge role). In everyday life we tend to assume all the productive and receptive roles in communication. But this doesn’t need to be the case in all circumstances. In institutional settings, for instance, it is possible for individuals to assume just some of the roles. A speech writer may write a text (author role) for someone else to present as their own ideas in a public talk (animator and principal roles). Needless to say that the ways in which these roles are enacted are influenced by sociocultural norms and participant volition. For this discussion the purpose of looking closely at the ways the focal teachers and students enacted the author–interpreter and principal–judge roles is to identify moments when they were engaged in contingent meaning making under their own volition.

3.1 Classroom interaction

Data extract (1) is drawn from a one-hour first-year university seminar on “Academic Literacy for Biology” led by a biology professor. There were nine students



in this seminar (all biology majors) – three were first language speakers of English and the others were from ethnolinguistically diverse backgrounds. The focal student, Lubanah, was from a Yoruba-speaking background; the teacher is from an English-speaking background. The topic of discussion for this seminar was academic writing. In general the tutor would lead by offering his views on an issue under discussion, and the students would join in at various points, sometimes taking the floor away from the tutor by interjecting with comments and questions. The tutor and the students were sitting in a circle. There was an open and participatory feel to the interaction. The exchanges shown below took place some eighteen minutes into the seminar. As the discussion below will show, the exchanges between the tutor and the focal student were not part of a routine activity; indeed they departed from the tutor-led topic momentarily. The interaction turned on the tutor's questioning of the accuracy and trustworthiness of the focal student's written work. In the exchanges both the tutor and the student repeatedly affirmed their positions but also showed efforts to avoid an impasse. Both parties were fully engaged and held themselves to be responsible for their utterances.

(1) *Academic Literacy Seminar for Biology Students*

L, student (Lubanah); J, student (Joanna); T, teacher/tutor

- 01 T: usually if you can take six words out of a sentence the sentence  
 02 becomes better for it (.) ok (.) so you know if I go to (.) I mean if  
 03 I pick on Lubanah's it's only (.) actually I shall pick on (.)  
 04 Lubanah's (.) I have got a bit here (.) it says unclear alright (.)  
 05 [T reading his own written remark on Lubanah's text; other students  
 06 smiled at Lubanah] of course unclear means I don't really know what  
 07 she's talking about (.) eh and (.) I am not going to spend a huge amount  
 08 of time working it out okay I can probably make a stab or  
 09 guess at it (.) because I haven't said wrong (.) ok which means I  
 10 understood it and it's wrong (.) it means I'm not quite sure  
 11 the point you are trying to say is but normally I haven't done this  
 12 yet I hope it works normally if I go to a student's sentence  
 13 which I am unclear about (.) normally I can make it clear  
 14 simply by deleting words (.) usually that is the case (.) shall  
 15 we have a go at your own essay [T turned and looked at L who was  
 16 sitting next to him]  
 17 L: yes sir  
 18 T: [T reading from L's written text, see line 3 in the  
 19 reproduced segment below; T had already marked this assignment and  
 20 had written "unclear" next to the sentence]

- 21 right (.) *during anaphase the m p f* which is maturing promoting  
 22 factor (.) have you done [(some) [T referring to L's writing]  
 23 L: [(I got that right)  
 24 T: it doesn't look quite right to me (.) is that  
 25 L: it is right (.) I think it is I think it's maturing  
 26 T: yes (.) is it (.) I think we'd better look it up . . .  
 27 [T asked students to take reference books from shelves behind them  
 28 to look up “MPF”; this activity lasted 15 seconds approximately  
 29 and involved several students; no clear answer was found)  
 30 T: I thought it was anaphase promoting factor (.) so I was a little  
 31 surprised by that (.) anyway  
 32 [T and students still looking at various reference books]  
 33 L: no it it gets switched off (.) (anaphasic) (.) and it breaks down  
 34 T: mature (.) let's just look it up (.) shall we (.) I did stall on that (.)  
 35 it's interesting you highlighted it (.) I also [had  
 36 L: [I found it in (2) you  
 37 know that book we got at the beginning of the year (.) that's where it  
 38 was [L looking at other students; T continued to look at reference  
 39 books for 10 seconds; other students muttering to one another]  
 40 T: well I don't (.) well (.) this book doesn't understand that word at all  
 41 [T still looking at a reference book]  
 42 L: I can bring it for you (.) that book because I know it is in that book  
 43 even maturing or maturing [L looking at T and other students;  
 44 T and other students continued looking and making passing remarks  
 45 on where to find the information]  
 46 T: right I (.) well eh (.) this book is superb and it is not in there (.)  
 47 I'm deeply suspicious  
 48 L: maybe the other one (is not good enough) then  
 49 T: maybe maybe it's right (.) maybe it's right (.) I'm not saying it's  
 50 wrong (.) I I remain suspicious  
 51 J: m o p [J was one of the students involved in the search for  
 52 information, looking at L]  
 53 L: m p f  
 54 J: Ooh  
 55 T: I think this is something called anaphase maturing promoting factor  
 56 L: don't worry sir (.) I'm going to email you in  
 57 T: ok I think we won't make an issue out of this . . .

The part of Lubanah's written text under discussion was as follows (the words read out by the tutor in bold):

For example the Maturing-Promoting Factor (MPF) is a CDK which is what initiates Mitosis when it is activated. When the Cyclin part of the MPF is in high concentrations during the G2 phase, the MPF is activated and it initiates a linkage of other chain reaction. **During anaphase the MPF** release a substance which cause they cyclin partner to detach form the protein Kinases and so they MPF is inactivated until its cyclin partner is in high concentrations so that it can bind again and initiate Mitosis.

Just before the onset of this exchange, the tutor had told the students that there were two different tasks in writing, one to organise and plan the whole text and the other to pay attention to the sentence level details. At the start of the extract the tutor was talking about the merit of reducing long sentences. One of the students, Joanna, agreed and gave an example of taking six words out of one of her sentences (and it still made sense). The tutor echoed the “taking out six words” point.

At the start of this exchange (line 1) the tutor turned to Lubanah’s written work for an example that would illustrate his point that shorter sentences tended to be “better”. But, as it happened, the tutor diverted his attention to the content accuracy in Lubanah’s writing. The discussion departed from the established focus. Digression is often part of naturally occurring interactional talk, but whenever it occurs, it needs to be understood and managed by the participants involved, which in itself is an aspect of communication not explicitly addressed by the CEFR. In any case this was a potentially awkward and face-threatening situation for Lubanah, although the tutor mitigated the force of his comments by saying that he was not sure if Lubanah’s formulation of MPF was “wrong” (lines 9 and 10). Lubanah appeared to consent to her work being used as a discussion point (line 17). However, she did not accept the tutor’s suggestion that her formulation of “MPF” was in need of affirmation (lines 23 and 25). She tried to defend her formulation twice. She first attempted a rebuttal of the tutor’s suggestion of the correct term being “anaphase promoting factor” (instead of “MPF”) (line 33); and then she offered to present the source material to support her case (lines 42 and 43). The tutor clearly did not accept Lubanah’s defence and continued to express his doubts (lines 46 and 47). At this point Lubanah also backed off a little by admitting the possibility that the book she used might not be “good enough” (line 48). This was followed by a mirroring move on the part of the tutor in which he made a small concession that the book used by Lubanah could be “right”, although he very quickly re-asserted his doubts and offered an alternative formulation (lines 49, 50, and 55). Lubanah then offered a resolution by offering to e-mail the tutor the necessary information (line 56), at which point the tutor closed the exchanges by accepting Lubanah’s offer and by downgrading the issue (line 57).

In this interaction the tutor and Lubanah engaged in a complex and delicate negotiation over an issue of subject content accuracy in public. After her initial assertion that her information was correct (lines 23 and 25) Lubanah appealed to the authority of the source of her reference book. The tutor, despite his awareness of a possible alternative answer (that he would prefer), presented his questioning as a form of “needing to know better.” The recourse to the reference books in the seminar room, the invitation to other students to join in the search for an answer, and the eventual settlement premised on Lubanah “emailing in” the source information all point to the participants’ awareness of the academic ethos – that opinions and judgements should be backed by reasons and evidence. The determination by both parties to pursue their case was tempered by face-giving mitigations, downgrading of one’s authority, appealing to external references. Pragmatically both parties took account of each other’s position and their utterances reflected a keen sense of wanting to achieve an acceptable settlement in an academic setting. The CEFR level descriptors (see Table 1) from the spoken language proficiency scales cover some aspects of this interaction, but none of them provide adequate purchase on the sociocultural and communicative complexity involved.

Data Extract (2) was part of a Year 12 (17-year-old students, penultimate year at senior secondary school) biology lesson in a London school. There were twelve students in the class, a majority of whom were from ethnolinguistic minority backgrounds. The focal student, Nadifo, was from a Somali-speaking community; the teacher is an English as first language speaker. The lesson was on the topic of seeds, with a particular focus on seed adaptation and dispersal. The teacher’s style of handling classroom interaction combined exaggerism-based humour with business-like teaching talk which made classroom interaction somewhat unpredictable. The students had to interpret and respond to the teacher’s utterances on a moment-by-moment basis. In this episode all involved were engaged in the receptive and productive discourse roles set out in Scollon’s (1996) framework.

A few moments before the onset of Extract (2), the students and the teacher engaged in some light-hearted bantering at the beginning of the lesson in which the teacher jokingly intimated that the reading material would be “too” difficult for some students. This led to a brief expression of mock indignation on the part of the students. There was a general sense of relaxed informality in the teacher–student interaction. At this point the teacher nominated one of the students, Yasir, to say why seeds needed to adapt. Yasir responded by saying “So that they can grow into a plant”. The teacher was not entirely satisfied with this answer and turned to Nadifo (who had put her hand up just as the teacher nominated Yasir):

**Table 1:** CEFR descriptors – spoken language

CEFR level descriptors	Inadequate fit
B2.1 Formal discussion and meetings Can participate actively in routine and non-routine formal discussion. (Council of Europe 2001: 78)	This generic descriptor focuses on active participation; it does not recognise the complex negotiation involving academic etiquettes and content knowledge instantiated in Extract (1).
B2.1 Formal discussion and meetings Can follow the discussion on matters related to his/her field, understand in detail the points given prominence by the speaker. (Council of Europe 2001: 78)	This descriptor focuses on subject content; it does not cover the pragmatic moves that involved interpersonal “give and take” negotiation that is evident in Extract (1).
B2.2 Formal discussion and meetings Can keep up with an animated discussion, identifying accurately arguments supporting and opposing points of view. (Council of Europe 2001: 78)	This descriptor is concerned with understanding and following arguments; in Extract (1) the tutor’s and the student’s arguments remained unchanged, but the participants had to negotiate a mutually agreeable settlement.
B2.2 Formal discussion and meetings Can express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly. (Council of Europe 2001: 78)	This descriptor deals with the ability to produce and understand convincing arguments; the exchanges between the participants in Extract (1) contained an additional quality: the ability to maintain the same argument while observing the appropriate social etiquettes.
B2.2 Overall spoken interaction Can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas. Can communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control [ . . . ] adopting a level of formality appropriate in the circumstances. (Council of Europe 2001: 74)	The generic nature of these descriptors does not facilitate recognition of the complex negotiation involving academic etiquettes and content knowledge in Extract (1).
B2.1 Overall spoken interaction Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction, and sustain relationships with native speakers quite possible without strain on either party. Can highlight the personal significance of events and experiences, account for and sustain views clearly by providing relevant explanations and arguments. (Council of Europe 2001: 74)	There is little doubt that the participants engaged in the exchanges spontaneously under their own volition. They also provided support reasons, if not explanations, for their arguments. But it is difficult to see how sustaining relationships with “native speakers” figures in the exchanges in Extract (1).

(2) *Biology Lesson in School*

N, student (Nadifo); T, teacher; Ss, students

- 01 T: Nadifo what were you going to say  
 02 N: what did he say [raised hand pointing to Yasir]  
 03 T: Nadifo what's wrong with you today  
 04 N: but you asked me a question about what he said  
 05 T: no I didn't (.) I asked you what you were going to say  
 06 N: you made me forget  
 07 T: you put your hand up and you were going to say something  
 08 N: I was going to say something about it being moved around  
 09 T: oh good (.) lovely (.) what is the posh name for things being moved  
 10 around  
 11 Ss: dispersion dispersal [several students joining in]  
 12 T: good (.) dispersion or dispersal (.) either of those would one of  
 13 three key ways that seeds are adapted . . .

At the start of Extract (2) the teacher nominated Nadifo to provide an answer. Nadifo appeared to have misconstrued the question and instead of giving an answer she raised a counter-question; she wanted to know if the teacher wanted her to repeat what Yasir said (line 2). The teacher did not respond to this question directly, instead she made a comment on Nadifo's general disposition in that lesson (line 3). This comment seemed to pick up on the earlier moment of joviality again. In line 4, Nadifo repeated and elaborated on her counter-question (in line 2). Here Nadifo implicitly suggested that she had understood that the teacher's question in line 3 was not meant literally; her response signalled that she would like to clarify what the teacher's initial question was. At this point the teacher repeated her initial question (line 5). Nadifo's response (line 6) here seems to be a quip. The teacher's response in line 7 suggests that she did not interpret Nadifo's playful expression of blame literally; instead she described her perception of Nadifo's earlier intention to speak (by putting her hand up). This move effectively cued the exchange back to the subject content.

The participants in this interaction were clearly in the business of doing a lesson within the situated constraints of institutional purposes, roles, and power relationships. However, it is also clear that the business of teaching and learning took place in a relaxed atmosphere that allowed, indeed generated, an interspersing of the routine classroom talk pattern of Teacher Initiation – Student Response – Teacher Evaluation (IRE) with *faux pas*, ludic blame, and mock indignation. The participants appeared to have interpreted one another's utterances with considerable pragmatic finesse. Nadifo, for instance, did not take offence from the

teacher's *ad hominem* comment in line 3. Indeed, she herself engaged in mock transgression when she “blamed” the teacher for her momentary forgetfulness. The classroom talk here was both complex and demanding. It was complex because it mediated subject teaching and learning at the same time as it constructed and managed a set of participant-engendered social relationships on a moment-by-moment basis. For the participants it was demanding because there was no established script for this kind of moment-by-moment negotiation of social relationships; all concerned had to make linguistic and pragmatic moves on a “give and take” basis. The CEFR descriptors do not cover such layered communication well. The closest descriptor is:

**C2 Overall spoken interaction**

Has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning. Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices. Can backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it. (Council of Europe 2001: 74)

The phrase “awareness of connotative levels of meaning” could be interpreted generously to provide some analytic purchase for the kind of pragmatic complexity seen in Extract (2). Overall, though, the semantic prosody of this descriptor suggests that it is about the language of exposition.

## 4 Revisiting the “social”

The discussion on the CEFR and the ELT textbooks has pointed to a strongly articulated view of the “social” that comprises three components: a body of language knowledge and typified ways of use modelled on the native speaker, pedagogic activities that encourage active use of language, and English as a conduit for multicultural encounters. Competence can be achieved by progressive acquisition of curriculum and textbook contents. The classroom data extracts, on the other hand, indicate that real-life language use is far more socioculturally complex and multifaceted than the curriculum statements and pedagogic materials discussed so far have been able to capture. Given the focus of this discussion I will pay particular attention to the first of these three components.

It may well be that any curriculum description of language use in communication is bound to be partial, given human meaning making is not easily circumscribed. So one shouldn't expect ELT curriculum and teaching materials to cover all contingencies, even in commonly occurring social contexts. However, this

does not mean that the conceptual base of ELT should not be broadened to enhance its capacity to mirror language practices as they exist and as they emerge. To do this it would be necessary to fundamentally critique the taken-for-granted assumption that all aspects of language use are governed by some immutable rules. In their seminal paper on communicative competence Canale and Swain (1980: 6) state that “[i]t seems entirely reasonable to assume [...] that there are rule-governed, universal, and creative aspects of sociolinguistic competence just as there are of grammatical competence.” The phrase “creative aspects” of sociolinguistic competence here means selective combinations of a set of permitted rules (i.e., not innovations that are different from established rules). This strongly articulated view has provided the underpinning of the epistemic certainties found in the curriculum statements and pedagogic materials discussed earlier. But are these certainties warranted?

Social interaction comprises both the routine and the unpredictable; it is intrinsically contingent. From a pedagogic point of view, descriptions of sociocultural and pragmatic rules of language use can only cover the most routine interactions. So ultimately such descriptions can only provide limited traction on sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of language use. In the case of ELT this limitation has been exacerbated by the tendency to model such rules on the putative native speaker who is usually imagined to be middle-class, speaking Standard English, and from the (relatively) affluent (Global) North. This portrayal is valid for a particular group of native speakers, but students of English are more than likely to encounter many other native speakers who do not fit this characterisation. (For a debate on this contentious issue, see Jenkins [2007], Leung et al. [1997], Rampton [1990], among others.) But there are, at least, three overlapping reasons for questioning any assumed certainties.

The first is concerned with recent sociodemographic developments, the second is concerned with the spread of English as a lingua franca in the world, and the third is conceptual. Since the mid-twentieth century many parts of the world have experienced significant population mobility for a variety of economic, political, and social reasons; this trend has accelerated in the past fifteen years. Twenty-nine per cent of the population in the United Kingdom, for instance, has “some connection with a country outside the UK (that is, either own, parents’ or grandparents’ birth country is outside UK)” (ESRC 2012: 13). Over 50% of London’s secondary school aged children are from ethnic minority backgrounds (Hamnet 2011). The use of English as an Additional Language (EAL) is widespread in all domains of society. The United Kingdom is by no means exceptional; high levels of ethnic diversity are now the norm in other English-speaking countries (indeed many parts of the world). Vertovec (2007: 1025) refers to this phenomenon as super-diversity and invites “social scientists [...] to



take more sufficient account of the conjunction of ethnicity with a range of other variables when considering the nature of various ‘communities’, their composition, trajectories, interaction and public service needs.” When people from different cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds interact and communicate, there is little guarantee that they share similar assumptions, norms, and practices. This can introduce additional complexity to social interaction. One consequence of this is that people with different ethnolinguistic backgrounds often have to work (even) hard(er) to negotiate meaning and to cooperate to achieve communication, an observation that has been well documented in ELF research. Both the processes of meaning negotiation and the development of situated emergent meanings need to be studied. In social environments, such as the classrooms discussed earlier, where ethnolinguistic diversity is the norm, narrow and static descriptions of what native speakers may do and say are suspect. This is a point of potential convergence of focus for Second Language Acquisition and ELF research.

The second reason is related to the spread of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in different parts of the world. By now it is commonly accepted that there are far more speakers of English with diverse first languages than native speakers of English. Many of these speakers use English to communicate with one another in contexts where native speakers of English may not play a part. Professionals from different language backgrounds working together on a project through the medium of English would be a good example of such a scenario (e.g., see Handford and Matous [2011] for an account of Japanese and Hong Kong engineers working together). Again, the ethnolinguistic diversity in such situations can mean that native speaker norms and practices may not be observed (because they are not needed). As Seidlhofer observes, the shared purpose of achieving communication may mean that the participants in interaction

gauge a level of language at which they can operate, and settle on ad hoc, pro tem norms that are adequate to the task [...] The crucial point in all this is that these norms are tacitly understood to be established during the interaction, within the current possibilities, and that they are primarily regulated by interactional exigencies, rather than by what native speakers would say, or would find correct, or “normal”, or “appropriate”. (Seidlhofer 2011: 18)

The third reason is primarily conceptual and it takes account of the observations related to ethnolinguistic diversity and ELF, as well as the widespread use of English in digital communication. Given the contingent nature of social interaction, which has been intensified by the fluidity and movements found in contemporary conditions, it no longer seems appropriate to conceptualise

the ways in which English language is used as a unified thing-like phenomenon. Pennycook’s (2010) pan-anthropological notion of language as local practice suggests one alternative. Resonating with the key insights emerging from ELF research, Pennycook (2010: 2) argues that we should abandon seeing language as named systems (e.g., English, Korean, etc.) with associated norms, and instead we should think in terms of language practices in specific places:

What we do with language in a particular place is a result of our interpretation of that place; and the language practices we engage in reinforce that reading of place. What we do with language within different institutions – church, schools, hospitals – for example, depends on our reading of these physical, institutional, social and cultural spaces. (Pennycook 2010: 2)

The emphasis of human agency in this view would sensitize us to the *always* emergent nature of how people use language (this point will be further developed in the final section). From a more discipline-specific perspective, Blommaert (2010: 5) suggests that in contemporary conditions of diversity and movement of ideas and people, both virtual and physical, there is a need for a “sociolinguistics of mobility” that focuses on the language resources deployed in concrete situations in relation to what has been brought along by participants in terms of sociocultural backgrounds, ages, gender, and so on, and how these resources are used in “real sociocultural, historical and political contexts.” In a similar vein in a discussion on the global spread of English, Hult (2012: 233) argues that “[c]entral to [the globalization] perspective is attention not only to the global and international characteristic of languages like English, but also to the ways in which languages that circulate around the globe also come to be discursively situated in specific national and local contexts.” In this perspective sociocultural and pragmatic norms are necessarily situated and must be kept under review constantly as mobility brings with it the possibility of change and instability. By extension, communicative competence is not a set of knowledge and skills that one can prescribe in advance; it is an outcome of how people use their knowledge and skills. As Hymes (1991: 50) points out, “competence is what actual persons can actually achieve, variable, vulnerable, a function of social circumstance.” This idea of privileging the local and the emergent sits comfortably with Maurantan’s (2012: 6) observation that we should be paying attention to “natural norms” that reflect “what a speech community adopts, tolerates, or rejects.” Seen in this light, a good deal of the emerging conceptual and analytic sensibilities in sociolinguistic research resonates with the insights from ELF research.

## 5 Unchaining ELT

The discussion so far suggests that the social dimension in ELT has been constrained by a narrow notion of the native speaker and an over-inflated sense of the applicability of the projected social rules of use. From the point of view of moving ELT on, taking account of the work in ELF, two conceptual moves regarding the social dimension can be taken to help free up the pedagogic space. Firstly, instead of trying to model the uses of English language on a set of typified conventions with reference to the projected “universal” native speaker, it would be helpful to try to empirically establish what people would consider as appropriate in particular domains, e.g., schooling, office work, and so on, in specific places. We need to take account of what people actually do. Seidlhofer’s (2011: 9) point that “ELF has taken on a life of its own [...] independent to a considerable degree of the norms established by its native users” would apply equally to English-dominant contexts where participants are from diverse language backgrounds. We now know classroom interactions can vary substantially, so there is little point in trying to describe (and prescribe) what should be said and done in abstracted scenarios in ELT materials. Schatzki’s notion of social practice can be adapted for pedagogic purposes:

A practice is a set of considerations that governs how people act. It rules action not by specifying particular actions to perform, but by offering matters to be taken into account of when acting and choosing. When observed, consequently, it qualifies the how as opposed to the what of actions. For instance, the words “civilly”, “punctually”, “scientifically”, “legally”, “morally” and “poetically” do not specify particular substantial actions. The practices of civility, science, law, morality, and poetry for which they stand are sets of considerations and procedures, which if observed qualify whatever is done as civil, punctual, scientific, legal, moral, or poetic [...] (Schatzki 1996: 96)

Seeing practice as a set of considerations guiding action obviates the need to paint a static picture of what people do and say. Instead, the teaching of English can focus on helping students understand the ways in which linguistic resources can be deployed to achieve communicative goals within situated practices, as accomplished by the participants in the classroom extracts seen earlier and in ELF research (e.g., Hülmbauer 2009; Jenkins 2011; Seidlhofer 2009; also see the collection in Archibald et al. 2011). On this view the teaching of social uses of English would need to include the inculcation of a capacity to recognise that linguistic resources can be used in a variety of ways to do things within a situated local practice, to acknowledge that the English language itself does not dictate what people say but their values and purposes do, and to explore the local prac-

tice as part of social participation (for a related discussion from an ELF standpoint, see Dewey 2012b).

Secondly, the notion of social participation in ELT should be revised, particularly with reference to the student. The general tendency is to see the student as an outsider to be inducted into the English language world seen through the lens of the native speaker, and competence is achieved by appropriating the typified native speaker ways of using English. On this view, the non-native users’ social participation through the English language is always partially checked by the need to reproduce speech and writing deemed acceptable. This is tantamount to a state of permanent dress rehearsal. But in a world where English is more likely to be used as a lingua franca and as an additional language than as a first language, this constructed non-native deficit deprives EAL and ELF users of their agency; it makes a mockery of their social engagement with others. At the risk of stating the obvious, this issue clearly signals that the work in ELF is relevant to ELT in terms of diverse ways of accomplishing communication.

To fully capture the meaning-making activities in situations where speakers of diverse backgrounds interact, a more transcendent perspective is required. Kramsch (2010: 6) argues for a proactive notion of symbolic competence that recognises the different ways in which language users from diverse backgrounds deploy their linguistic resources. Symbolic competence goes beyond reproducing what has been learned, it also validates new and different uses (also see Warriner 2010). By acknowledging that the English language can be used by anyone, EAL/ELF and native speakers alike, with whatever linguistic resources at their disposal, to participate in social activities in their own right, the teaching of social uses of English can avoid the pedagogically limiting censorious parochialism engendered by the native speaker-ism stranglehold. This liberating perspective would also allow teachers and students to explore the myriad of social and language practices mediated through the English language in the world today. By adopting situated practices as a framing principle, ELT would be better equipped to take account of the social dimension in language use.

## References

- Alderson, Charles. 2007. The CEFR and the need for more research. *Modern Language Journal* 91(4). 659–663.
- Archibald, Alasdair, Alessia Cogo & Jennifer Jenkins (eds.). 2011. *Latest trends in ELF research*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Blommaert, Jan. 2010. *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloome, David, Marlene Beierle, Margaret Grigorenko & Susan Goldman. 2009. Learning over time: Uses of intercontextuality, collective memories, and classroom chronotopes in the construction of learning opportunities in a ninth-grade language arts classroom. *Language and Education* 23(4). 313–334.
- Bonnet, Gérard. 2007. The CEFR and education policies in Europe. *Modern Language Journal* 91(4). 669–672.
- Brumfit, Christopher & Keith Johnson (eds.). 1979. *The communicative approach to language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. 1999. *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Canagarajah, Suresh. 2006. TESOL at forty: What are the issues? *TESOL Quarterly* 40(1). 9–34.
- Canale, Michael & Merrill Swain. 1980. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics* 1(1). 1–47.
- Cheng, Liying, Yoshinori Watanabe & Andy Curtis (eds.). 2004. *Washback in language testing: Research contexts and methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Despaigne, Colette & John Grossi. 2011. Implementation of the CEFR in a Mexican context. *Synergies Europe* 6. 65–74.
- Dewey, Martin. 2012a. Beyond labels and categories in English Language Teaching: Critical reflections on popular conceptualisations. In Constant Leung & Brian Street (eds.), *English: A changing medium for education*, 129–149. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Dewey, Martin. 2012b. Towards a *post-normative* approach: Learning the pedagogy of ELF. *Journal of English as Lingua Franca* 1(1). 141–170.
- Economic and Social Research Council with Institute for Social and Economic Research & National Centre for Social Research. 2012. *Understanding society: Findings 2012*. Colchester, Essex: Institute for Social and Economic Research.
- Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Halliday, Michael. 1973. *Explorations in the functions of language*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, Michael. 1975. *Learning how to mean: Explorations in the development of language*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, Michael, Angus MacIntosh & Peter Strevens. 1964. *The linguistic sciences and language teaching*. London: Longman.
- Hamnet, Chris. 2011. Concentration or diffusion? The changing geography of ethnic minority pupils in English secondary schools, 1999–2009. *Urban Studies* (on-line version). DOI: 10.1177/0042098011422573.
- Handford, Michael & Petr Matous. 2011. Lexicogrammar in the international construction industry: A corpus-based case study of Japanese–Hong-Kongese on-site interactions in English. *English for Specific Purposes* 30(2). 87–100.
- Holliday, Adrian. 1994. *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holliday, Adrian. 2005. *The struggle to teach English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Howatt, Anthony & Henry Widdowson. 2004. *A history of English language teaching*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hülmbauer, Cornelia. 2009. “We don’t take the right way, we just take the way that we think you will understand” – The shifting relationship between correctness and effectiveness in ELF. In Anna Mauranen & Elina Ranta (eds.), *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and findings*, 323–346. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hult, Francis. 2012. English as a transcultural language in Swedish policy and practice. *TESOL Quarterly* 46(2). 230–257.
- Hymes, Dell. 1972. On communicative competence. In John Pride & Janet Holmes (eds.), *Sociolinguistics*, 269–293. London: Penguin.
- Hymes, Dell. 1974. Ways of speaking. In Richard Bauman & Joel Sherzer (eds.), *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*, 433–451. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hymes, Del. 1991. Is poetics original and functional? *Language and Communication* 11(1/2). 49–51.
- Ingram, David & Amanda Bayliss. 2007. *IELTS as a predictor of academic language performance, part 1* (IELTS Research Reports 7). London: British Council.
- Jenkins, Jennifer. 2007. *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, Jennifer. 2011. Accommodating (to) ELF in the international university. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43(4). 926–936.
- Kramsch, Claire. 2010. The symbolic dimensions of the intercultural. Plenary speech. <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&pdfType=1&fid=7931790&jid=LTA&volumeld=-1&issuelid=&aid=7931788> (accessed 2 October 2011).
- Lan, Pei-Jun. 2007. 基礎華語文能力測驗與歐洲共同架構的對應關係 [The relationship between Chinese Language proficiency and CEFR]. *台灣華文教學學會會刊 [Journal of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language]* 3(2). 39–47.
- Lee, Young-Ju & Jennifer Greene. 2007. The predictive validity of an ESL placement test: A mixed methods approach. *Journal of Mixed Research Methods* 1(4). 366–389.
- Leung, Constant. 2005. Convivial communication: Recontextualizing communicative competence. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 15(2). 119–144.
- Leung, Constant. 2010. Language teaching and language assessment. In Ruth Wodak, Barbara Johnstone & Paul Kerswill (eds.), *The Sage handbook of sociolinguistics*, 545–564. London: Sage.
- Leung, Constant, Roxy Harris & Ben Rampton. 1997. The idealised native speaker, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities. *TESOL Quarterly* 31(3). 543–560.
- Martyniuk, Waldemar. 2005. Relating language examinations to the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Paper presented at the Multilingualism and Assessment: Achieving Transparency, Assuring Quality, Sustaining Diversity. Proceedings of the ALTE Conference, May, Berlin.
- Mauranen, Anna. 2012. *Exploring ELF: Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McNamara, Tim. 2011. Managing learning: Authority and language assessment. *Language Teaching* 44(04). 500–515.
- Mitchell, James. 1984. Typicality and the case study. In Roy Ellen (ed.), *Ethnographic research: A guide to general conduct*, 238–241. New York: Academic Press.
- Oxenden, Clive & Christina Latham-Koenig. 2006. *New English file*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Paul, Andrea. 2007. *IELTS as a predictor of academic language performance. Part 2* (IELTS Research Report 7). London: British Council.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 2010. *Language as a local practice*. London: Routledge.
- Rampton, Ben. 1990. Displacing the “native speaker”: Expertise, affiliation, and inheritance. *ELT Journal* 44(2). 97–101.
- Saslow, Joan & Allen Ascher. 2006. *Top notch 3*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Savignon, Sandra. 2005. Communicative language teaching: Strategies and goals. In Eli Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*, 635–651. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Scarino, Angela. 2005. *Learning languages in the New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education. <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-resource-bank/Learning-languages/Supporting-materials#resource-1139>.
- Schatzki, Theodore. 1996. *Social practices: A Wittgensteinian approach to human activity and the social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scollon, Ron. 1996. Discourse identity, social identity, and confusion in intercultural communication. *Intercultural Communication Studies* 6(1). 1–16.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara. 2009. Common ground and different realities: World Englishes and English as a lingua franca. *World Englishes* 28(2). 236–245.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara. 2011. *Understanding English as a lingua franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soars, Liz & John Soars. 2009. *New headway – Intermediate student’s book*, 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soars, Liz & John Soars. 2011. *New headway – Elementary student’s book*, 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2007. Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6). 1024–1054.
- Von Ahn, Michelle, Ruth Lupton, Charley Greenwood & Dick Wiggins. 2010. *Languages, ethnicity and education in London*. London: Institute of Education.
- Warriner, Doris. 2010. Communicative competence revisited: An ethnopoetic analysis of narrative performances of identity. In Francis Hult (ed.), *Directions and prospects for educational linguistics*, 63–77. New York: Springer.
- Widdowson, Henry. 2003. *Defining issues in English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, Henry. 2012. ELF and the inconvenience of established concepts. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* 1(1). 5–26.

## Appendix: transcription key

<i>italics</i>	teacher reading from student text
[	overlapping
(.)	pause of 1 second approx.
(number)	pause longer than 1 second
(word)	approximate transcription
[ ]	noises and comments related to the utterance

## Bionote

*Constant Leung* is Professor of Educational Linguistics in the Centre for Language Discourse and Communication, Department of Education and Professional Studies at King's College London. He also serves as Deputy Head of Department. His research interests include additional/second language education in ethnically and linguistically diverse societies, language assessment, language policy, and teacher professional development. He is Associate Editor for *Language Assessment Quarterly* and Editor of Research Issues for *TESOL Quarterly*.



